

Seeking truth and challenging prejudice: confronting
race hatred through the South African Greyshirt case of
Levy v Von Moltke

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as part of the collaborative doctoral degree and/or fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the case of *Levy v Von Moltke (South Africa, 1934)* in which Reverend Abraham Levy (my great-grandfather) sued three leaders of a fascist organisation (Greyshirts) for defamation after they published a document based on the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (a notorious antisemitic propaganda tool) and implied that it was authored by him. The libel action, which Reverend Levy won, was the first time in a court of law that the *Protocols* was proved to be a fabrication. A central question is why, despite this case and other exposés of the *Protocols* as a fabrication, it continues to have widespread currency and appeal. The thesis interrogates whether the form of the narrative influences perception, and concludes that the courtroom was an effective forum for identifying and disproving the falsehoods disseminated by the Greyshirts that were gaining traction at a popular level. While the initial impact of the case was considerable, with time the effect has diminished. The creative component of this project seeks to 'unshackle' the Greyshirt case from the constraints of time, place and form, and re-frame it as a documentary stage play. In addition to critically analysing the case and assessing its contribution in academic terms, this project seeks to create a vehicle by which a public conversation could possibly begin and the contemporary reverberations could be considered. These themes have pertinence to contemporary ideologically-driven hate, propaganda and violence, and the continuing difficulty of separating truth from falsehood in public discourse.